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## Beyond the A,B,C's

Teachers talk about what it takes to be great

By Krista Nightengale  
Associate Editor

Everyone has one great teacher who impacted their life. It could be your third-grade PE teacher high school science teacher, or maybe your yearbook adviser in college. No matter who it is or how old you were, you'll never forget that teacher.

For Rachel Wyatt, a second-year physics and chemistry teacher at The Hockaday School, that person was an education professor at Rice University. Due to her professor's teaching style, Wyatt was encouraged to make her own classroom fun, inviting, and challenging.

For Gail Hartin, the director of undergraduate programs for the school of education and human development at Southern Methodist University, it was her high school Spanish teacher. Hartin looked forward to each class because her teacher was always excited about the subject. Hartin is a former University Park Elementary School principal.

And for Arnold Holtberg, it wasn't just one person, but a multitude of teachers who have had an impact on him.

"What I have done is to incorporate methods and behaviors and characteristics of multiple teachers," said Holtberg, the Eugene McDermott Headmaster at St. Mark's School of Texas. "So I've tried to be a bit eclectic in terms of taking from different folks things that I thought did very well, and that I thought were very effective."

Wyatt, Hartin, and Holtberg saw aspects in their mentors they wanted to emulate in their own teaching.



Staff photos: Matt Norris

Although **Rachel Wyatt** is only in her second year of teaching at Hockaday, she's come to realize what it takes to be a great teacher.

styles.

But what makes a truly great teacher?

Wyatt said she believes it's someone who "walks the walk," which is something her Rice professor

"I always loved going to her class because she wasn't just disseminating information to us, she was helping us to apply the information or pick out the salient points in what we read," Wyatt said.

So when she graduated, Wyatt put thought into what kind of teacher she wanted to be.

"I wanted to be a challenging teacher," she said. "To inspire them to aspire. Also to be a motivational teacher. To bring an energy to my classroom that hopefully would infuse my students with the same passion that I have for the subjects that I'm teaching."

Wyatt also believes that in order to be a good teacher, one must have a caring attitude. Caring teachers, she said, will know what's going on in their students' lives outside the classroom and be able to take that into account during the class period.



Having an interactive class helps Wyatt's students learn.

Holtberg agreed that a main ingredient to being a teacher is caring about the development, intellect and otherwise, of every pupil.

"I wouldn't be in this business if my primary concern weren't about the kids," Holtberg said. "Here at Mark's, it's all about the boys. Everything we do is focused on helping them become the very best they can be."

Hartin said caring for the students goes beyond the individual pupil and extends into their families. Beyond that, teachers must also have good relationships with each other in order to be successful.

According to Holtberg, good teachers possess a well-versed knowledge of their field of study. He is knowledgeable in the subjects he teaches, ancient and medieval history and religion, because he is continually seeking to educate himself.

"Preparation is an ongoing thing," he said. "Stimulated people are the most stimulating, so ongoing professional development is necessary."

Hartin said teachers must not only continually educate themselves on their particular subjects of expertise, but also be able to grow as teaching styles evolve.

"We continue to learn more and more about the needs of students and the ways to optimize their learning," she said. "And in addition, knowledge and technology continue to evolve, so it's important for all of us to stay current — keep our content knowledge fresh."

She said classrooms today are more student-directed rather than teacher-directed.

Wyatt said she learned in her first year of teaching that there are many different types of students. To meet all their needs, she'll often do a lab, which appeals to the hands-on students, and then follow that up with discussion, which is for those who learn better with audio. Through this method, she's able to reach a majority of her pupils.

Wyatt said that although she's in front of the classroom, she still gets nervous when it comes to test time.



Wyatt's college professor encouraged her to make her classroom fun and inviting.

“As a student, you’re so nervous about a test,” she said. “As a teacher, I get about as worked up as do. I’m so anxious for a test to be a fair assessment. I get worried and nervous for them.”

Since graduating and teaching for two years, Wyatt’s learned that she’s not finished learning.

And even though Wyatt, Hartin, and Holtberg spent many years behind the desk as students, they : their education has not stopped since stepping up to the blackboard. For them, being a good teacher about continually learning from their students.

## **GAIL’S TOP 10**

Gail Hartin’s famous for doing top 10 lists, so here’s her idea of what it takes to be a good teacher

1. A good teacher feels a calling.
2. A good teacher feels a passion for learning and also for pedagogy.
3. A good teacher is able to connect well with people and is willing to build positive relationships with students, parents, and colleagues.
4. A good teacher is able to display courage and fortitude in a challenging situation.
5. A good teacher is able to focus on standards and expectations and find creative ways to meet those standards.
6. A good teacher can find ways to maintain a balanced life despite the many demands of teaching.
7. A good teacher is eager to continue to grow professionally.
8. A good teacher feels a commitment to individual students and also to the whole child.
9. A good teacher can multitask.
10. A good teacher shows initiative outside the classroom.

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